



ON THREE APPARENTLY UNDESCRIBED BIRDS
FROM HENDERSON OR ELIZABETH ISLAND,
PAUMOTU GROUP.

By ALFRED J. NORTH, C.M.B.O.U., C.M.Z.S., Ornithologist.

(Plates viii.-ix.)

The Trustees have recently received from Mr. A. E. Stephen six birds, in spirits, collected by him on Henderson or Elizabeth Island, an outlier of the Paumotu Group or Low Archipelago, in the South Pacific, in September, 1907. They are referable to three species, which may be described as follows:—

CALLIPTILUS (!) STEPHENI, sp. nov.

Adult.—General colour above green; lower back, rump, and upper tail-coverts yellowish-green, light green around their tips; wings green, the inner webs and tips of primaries and the outer web of the first primary blackish-brown; tail feathers yellow, washed with green, which is more distinct on their outer webs, the basal portion of the inner web of the lateral feathers red; pileum green, with long and narrow paler green centres to the feathers; lores, cheeks, throat, fore-neck and breast red; on each side of the fore-neck is a patch of green which becomes narrower and extends downwards in a line towards the centre of the chest, where some of the feathers have a dull purplish wash; abdomen and thighs purplish-red tinged with violet, which is more distinct on the latter; under tail-coverts light green, their basal portion washed with yellow; under wing-coverts green, the inner ones red; “bill reddish-orange; legs, feet and iris reddish-orange” (Stephen). Total length, 8 inches; wing, 4·9; central tail feathers, 3·5; the outermost on either side 2·2; bill, 0·6; tarsus, 0·55.

Type.—In the Australian Museum.

Remarks.—The present species I have associated with the name of its discoverer, Mr. Alfred Ernest Stephen. Hitherto the genus *Calliptilus* has been represented by a single species, *C. solitarius*, inhabiting the Fiji Islands; but in assigning the present species to that genus, I am by no means certain that I

am correct in doing so, for in the longer and graduated form of the tail, the central feathers much exceeding the lateral ones, it may be considered necessary to institute a sub-genus of *Calliptilus* for its reception. A second specimen of *C. stephensi*, probably a younger bird, has the green patch on the side of the fore-neck larger and more irregularly defined, and the vent light green, shaded with yellow like the under tail-coverts.

PTILOPUS INSULARIS, sp. nov.

Adult.—General colour above, including the wings, dull bronze-green, the apical portion of the outermost primaries blackish-brown, slightly glossed with bronze-green, the first primary much attenuated towards the tip, the remainder of the quills with very narrow whitish edges on their outer webs, the innermost secondaries externally margined and tipped with dull yellow; tail bronze-green, approaching a coppery hue on the central pair of feathers, the inner webs of the remainder grey crossed with a subterminal blackish-brown band, which is succeeded by an apical band of light grey, both of these bands being almost obsolete on the outer webs of the feathers; forehead and crown of the head deep rose-pink; feathers above the eye and the occiput green, passing into a greyish-green on the hind-neck; chin and centre of the throat white; cheeks, sides of the neck, and under surface grey, the feathers on the fore-neck with indistinct whitish centres, those on the centre of the breast broadly tipped with olive-yellow, some of the feathers on the thighs indistinctly tipped with dull green; vent white; under tail-coverts white, the apical portion of the longer ones pale yellow; under surface of tail grey, with a subterminal blackish-brown and an apical greyish-white band; under wing-coverts grey; "bill, legs and feet crimson-lake; iris rich yellow" (Stephen). Total length, 9·5 inches; wing, 5·7; tail, 4·5; bill, 0·58; tarsus, 1.

Type.—In the Australian Museum.

Remarks.—*Ptilopus insularis* is undoubtedly very closely allied to *P. coralensis*, as described by Count Salvadori¹ in the "Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum," and to the "supposed type of *Ptilopus coralensis*," described by Count Salvadori on the following page under the name of *Ptilopus smithsonianus*. From both, however the present species may be

¹Salvadori—Cat. Bds. Brit. Mus., xxi., 1893, p. 104.

distinguished by the deep rose-pink feathers of the crown of the head and forehead, extending right on to the culmen, and having no narrow intervening greenish band of feathers as found in the former of these species, nor greenish grey forehead as in *P. smithsonianus*; moreover the chin, centre of throat, and vent are white, and the tail is longer. Another specimen, evidently an immature bird, judging by the feathers of the breast, has only an indication of the rose-pink hue on the forehead, and the olive-yellow patch on the centre of the breast is very much paler, and only the extreme tips of the longer under tail-coverts are yellow. Wing, 5·55 inches.

PORZANA ATRA, sp. nov.

Adult.—The entire plumage black, with a slight gloss on the upper parts; “bill, black; iris, ruby-red; eyelid, orange-yellow; legs and feet, orange-yellow” (Stephen). Total length, 7 inches; wing, 3·1; tail, 1·6; bill, 0·75; tarsus, 1·12.

Type.—In the Australian Museum.

Remarks.—The existence of a Water Crake on the island is an important discovery, for Mr. Stephen informs me that no permanent fresh water is found there. The two specimens he procured are alike in plumage, and were obtained in thick scrub. These birds were never seen to fly, but could run with great rapidity, their legs and feet being comparatively thicker than the Australian members of this genus. They were very tame, and would approach near to the party while they were seated at lunch in the scrub. The Black Water Crakes were shot by Mr. Stephen with a revolver, as were also the other birds he obtained on the island. The sexual organs were too mutilated to satisfactorily identify the sex of the specimens.

Mr. Stephen also showed me photographs of a young “Mutton Bird” (*Puffinus, sp. ?*) and of the egg of *Gygis candida*, laid on the limb of a tree. The eggs of this species were also found laid on the top of bare rocks on the highest part of the island.

The following are Mr. Stephen’s notes:—“The birds in spirits I presented to the Trustees of the Australian Museum were collected by me on the 10th September, 1907, during a visit paid to Henderson Island by a party from the S.S. ‘Tyrian,’ under charter to the Pacific Phosphate Co., Ltd.

“Henderson Island (Plate viii.) is an elevated coral islet about six miles long and three miles broad, fifty feet above sea level. The tableland is flat and roughly strewn with dead coral fragments and pointed or knife-edged

weathered compact coralline limestone. The vegetation is dense scrub, with vines and ferns (Plate ix.). *Pandanus* trees were about the highest on the island, some quite thirty feet high. The soil is very scanty, and the vegetation most often thickest in slight depression areas where it is more abundant. No water or swampy places were found, drinking water having to be taken on the various excursions. The island is uninhabited, and has rarely been visited by vessels, but the Pitcairn Islanders occasionally visit it for fishing purposes, since fish are very plentiful there. There are two cocoanut trees on the beach on the north end of the island, planted many years ago by some of the Pitcairn Islanders.

“Henderson or Elizabeth Island belongs to Great Britain, and the British Consul at Tahiti has jurisdiction over it.

“Animal life noticed during the short stay was as follows :— One variety of rat, very similar to the Pacific type; one skink (very plentiful); one small butterfly; one paroquet (not very plentiful—only seen on the high part of the island, and generally in pairs); one black crake (fairly plentiful in the interior of island; probably lives on tiny land molusks, which abound in the scanty soil over the high land); one dove, pink-crested, found more or less in flocks of about 20 or more; ‘mutton birds’ (*Puffinus*, sp. ?) were very plentiful, and laid their eggs on the ground among the scrub in more or less secluded places all over the island; white terns were also plentiful; noddies were not so plentiful; frigate birds were numerous; one species of small brown bird with white tail feathers, similar to one at Pitcairn.”